Introduction

A sunny day on the beach can be a completely different world than what we see on an everyday biases. When at the beach I feel as if I can just sit back, relax and enjoy the sun; however, while soaking up the sun I realized that I really enjoy people watching. I have found that I tend to wonder what is going on in the life of the people I am watching, and by observing their actions it gives me clues to parts of their everyday life. In Kirkland there are many beaches to choose from, Houghton beach though is one of the most popular for families and people of all ages. By conducting a private study I took down notes on the people and my surroundings and analyzed the data to understand why people go to the beach.

Methodology

Like I said, Houghton beach is a very popular beach on the Kirkland waterfront. Its location is perfect for teens, families and adults. Teenagers have come to love Houghton because of the beach volleyball court, Kid Valley restaurant, and the use of a swimming area. On a beautiful sunny summer day in Washington people from all around the area flock to the beach, I am one of those people. Kirkland is such a great city to be in. I love to go down there get a bite to eat off of Central Street, then I head to one of the less crowed beaches to lie out and get my vitamin D from the sun. For the assignment I needed to go to the most crowed beach in order to get the most cultural interaction. Studying people on a beach is a very simple thing to do. All you need is a towel to lie on, a pen with some paper for note taking, and something else to help you blend in (e.g., a swimsuit or a lunch).

Data Presentation and Analysis

This study took place on a late Friday afternoon between five and six PM at Houghton beach, Kirkland, Washington.

When I first got to the park I noticed that there were three main areas where certain people were hanging out. The playground was full of children with their parents staying nearby. I also noticed that the many of the children would run on the grass towards the water which was also full of children along with some teens cooling down from the warm summer day. The grass area was a main spot for young adults to lie down and enjoy the sun’s rays, along with the volleyball area which was a major hang out spot for older teens and young adults.

Houghton beach has many natural components that affect the culture. In the summer time you have the sun out which brings heat. The beach is located on Lake Washington which becomes a great access to take a cool down swim, wind surf, or enjoy boating. With a beach comes sand, which is a great place for children to play and sand also makes a great area for beach volleyball. In the water there are a few floating docks that teens and adults can swim out to, and there is also a wrap around dock that lots of people jump off of, have picnics on, or tie a boat to it. Up from the water is a hill covered with grass that moves into a playground filled with bark chips. Around the beach are many trees, and even a few statues. Looking out to the horizon you can see the Seattle skyline and beautiful mountains. The beach even has a spot for lifeguards and they have a bathroom building.

The natural components and even the manmade components draw many people and animals to the beach. There were children, men, women, old people, lifeguards, parents, dogs, friends, loners, ducks and even some seagulls. Children tend to play by the water with the parents standing nearby. While I was observing, there was this little boy maybe about 3 feet tall with bleach blonde hair in a lightning McQueen swim outfit. He was having so much fun running, actually it was more like bouncing, up and down where the water meets the sand. And after he was finished running he went up to some other little boys and started chasing them. On the sand many children build sand castles where their parents either partake or stand in the distance taking photos. In the volleyball area that is where the majority of the men hung out. If they were not playing volleyball they were either diving or flipping off one of the distant floating docks. I saw three old couples all who would take their time strolling through the beach, or they would sit on a bench and watch the water. Since Houghton beach is very popular they have a lifeguard on duty. I asked a parent nearby what they thought about having a lifeguard and she said, “Its wonderful…I don’t have to fully watch my daughter which she is swimming”. The grassy hill brings a lot of women to spread out and sun bathe. I found that there are a lot of people that go to the beach strictly to work on getting a tan.

What I love about being at the beach is the sounds of enjoyment. I decided to close my eyes for about ten minutes to really focus on my surroundings. While listening I could hear the little waves crashing up onto the beach made by the boats. You could also hear the engines of the boats along with wind blowing through the trees. There is a lot of laughter from families and children. Babies will cry and scream and then you would either hear a parent going to comfort their child or to yell at another child. I could also hear an occasional dog bark. I could also hear clapping and some peoples music playing. The sounds found at the beach are not what we hear in our everyday life. We become so used to hearing the horns of cars or the bass of someone’s music and forget to listen to happiness.

(Ethnology) To be done by August 7th

Conclusion

Even though going to the beach seems to be a summer ritual it does not end there. I would love to expand my research by going to the beach at different seasons of the year. During the fall and winter months I know that many college students tend to go on walks, do homework, or just get out having some fun. The types of people that would be at Houghton, the sounds and even the environment I believe would be so much different and would be a wonderful thing to add to continue this assignment. Through the assignment I have learned to really look more from the outside of what is going on, then after you figure out the shell you can dig in and get messy. I knew the shell of Houghton beach because I go to the area so much. I was already able to make some judgments; yet, after I picked apart the sounds, the environment and why people were there I learned really *why* people go to the beach. It is all for the enjoyment and the experience of something we do not get to do in our everyday life.